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Alexander, George

The... words spoken at the funeral of Silas B. Brownell

[New York]

[1918]

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Gift of the President
AUG 20 1918

In Memoriam

Silas B. Brownell

1830 – 1918

The following words spoken
at the funeral service of Silas B. Brownell
June the fourteenth, 1918, at the
Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York,
by the Reverend George Alexander, D. D.
have been here printed in grateful memory
by his family for his friends.

We gather here not with lamentation, but with gratitude for the release which death brings to those who have tarried long at the feast of life. We have come to pay a tribute of friendship and affection and to place ourselves for a few moments under the spell of a finished life. It will suffice if I can make articulate what you are thinking concerning your friend and mine.

It is much to be able to say of him that he has spent sixty-five years in the practice of an arduous profession, under the stress of fierce temptation in the pitiless glare of a great city like this, and has left an unsullied name. For this we give thanks.

Professional recognition and professional honors were not denied to our friend. But a mere professional career is comparatively narrow and unfruitful if divorced from those social and civic interests which enriched the life of Silas Brownell.

We are glad to remember that when the Nation's life was in peril, he marched away with the regiment that has for generations been the pride of the City of New York, to take his part in the great struggle. When peace came his passion for helpfulness linked him to a great variety of public interests,

educational, philanthropic and religious, in which he sought not distinction or power, but opportunity to serve.

In most things a conservative of the conservatives, in education, and especially in the education of women, he was a progressive if not a radical. This explains his identification with Barnard College from the beginning, and his influence in shaping its development to the present hour.

To his own Alma Mater he was a devoted Alumnus. Forty-six years he served on its governing board and for nearly forty years as its presiding officer. Through days of strife and days of peace, through evil report and good report, Union College has been enshrined in his heart.

None could know him intimately without recognizing in his nature a certain ruggedness and occasional asperity like that of the hills among which he was born and reared; its winsomeness and charm were best known to those successive generations of aspiring youth whom it was his privilege to grapple to his heart. There are no keener critics of the fundamentals in character than college boys. To submit to their scrutiny and to hold through seventy years their love and confidence is ample certificate of worth.

Perhaps I may, without being intrusive, refer to his membership in a "solempe and gret fraternity," which threw its mystic spell about him in the days when life was young and to which he became in riper years mentor and guide. To have attended for half a century without a break the annual banquet of a sodality in which veterans and lads renewed allegiance to the ideals of boyhood, and to have been in such gatherings the centre of attraction and interest, is evidence of a heart perennially young.

There will be other occasion to make record of another loyalty, the highest and holiest of all, to which he witnessed by fifty-five years of membership in this great church, of which he has long been the senior elder. He was a man of faith. The faith of his fathers was his own faith by life-long experiment. To him a risen Saviour was the companion of his pilgrimage and the life immortal no peradventure. I recall a conversation with him many years ago in which, referring to members of his family, he said: "I have one child that will always be young, and I cannot express the comfort which I have in that child. For the others I have anxieties and fears, but for that one, only a cherished memory and an immortal hope."

We doubt not that he has now entered that realm where faith and loyalty and service have their fruition and reward.

"Gone; but nothing can bereave him,
Of the force he made his own,
Being here, and we believe him,
Something far advanced in state,
And that he wears a truer crown,
Than any wreath that man can weave him.

. . . . .

God accept him. Christ receive him."

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